

Report publicizes county's dirty air

San Joaquin earns F for ozone, pollution days

By Joe Goldeen - Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Wednesday, April 29, 2009

STOCKTON - No one in San Joaquin County should be breathing a sigh of relief over air quality.

But the failing grade the county gets from the American Lung Association in today's annual report card has been taken to task by regional air pollution regulators. They call it a simplistic snapshot that does not reflect the progress that's been made over many years.

The Lung Association's 10th annual State of the Air 2009 report ranks Bakersfield and surrounding Kern County as having the nation's worst annual particulate pollution..

San Bernardino County, east of Los Angeles, was rated as having the nation's worst ozone pollution, or smog.

Both types of pollution damage people's lungs and can have immediate and negative long-range effects on individual health, including leading to early death.

San Joaquin County earned an F for high ozone days - 29 over a three-year period from 2005 through 2007 - and an F for particulate pollution days - 23 over the same three years. It received a passing grade for particulate pollution on an annual basis.

Of California's 58 counties, the Lung Association gave 38 failing grades, while 16 - almost all of them coastal counties - earned A's.

This year, 12 more California counties received failing grades than last year, reflecting the tighter national ozone standard implemented in 2008.

"Achieving and maintaining healthy air must be a public health priority, and we cannot relent on our work as a state and as individuals to keep our air clean," said Dr. Tony Gerber, a volunteer with the American Lung Association in San Francisco and a pulmonary specialist.

"Although there are some improvements, the significant number of failing grades for ozone and particle pollution means that the health and lives of millions of Californians are at risk because of our dirty air," Gerber said.

Jaime Holt, chief communications officer for the Fresno-based San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the government agency that regulates air quality in eight counties from Lodi to Bakersfield, openly objected to the Lung Association's report card.

"We feel it actually may be hindering the air quality efforts in the Valley by not recognizing the air quality improvements that have been made," Holt said.

"It's not a true snapshot of what's really been done. And it fails to recognize that air quality in the Valley is actually the cleanest it has ever been in recorded history." The district has been tracking air quality for about 30 years.

Billions of dollars have been invested by Valley industry and agribusiness, and measurable improvements have been made in reducing industry pollutants, mobile sources and "individual understanding of the issues and a willingness to make changes" in daily behavior, Holt said.

She said the grading system - consistently giving Valley counties an F - is discouraging and counterproductive, because it doesn't show the public that the effort going into cleaning up the air is making a difference.

"The report doesn't reflect that," she said, recommending that the public go to the air district's Web site, valleyair.org, for more information.

Bakersfield air again on worst list

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Not much is new as far as our ranking in the American Lung Association's annual ranking of cities with the unhealthiest air.

For the third year in a row, Bakersfield ranked as the nation's second smoggiest city behind Los Angeles, according to the 2009 report released Tuesday.

And we took the No. 1 spot for the highest annual levels of fine particulates. (Last year we were third behind Pittsburgh, Penn., and Los Angeles, respectively.)

The ranking is based on air quality in major cities from 2005 to 2007.

While the annual report usually creates a few bruising national headlines for Bakersfield and Los Angeles, local air regulators say this is one ranking we won't do well in anytime soon.

The valley's bowl-like shape serves to trap polluting emissions, and stagnant air conditions allow them to build up over time. And because air in the valley drifts southward, Bakersfield and Kern County see the worst of the pollution.

Air quality has improved, regulators say, but it will take time to see major strides.

Under recently-adopted plans, the most-polluted areas of the San Joaquin Valley aren't not expected to reach safe levels of fine particulates until 2014. And safe levels for smog aren't expected until 2023.

Bakersfield No. 1 in fine-particle pollution

The Kern County city replaced Los Angeles in a lung association report. But L.A.-Long Beach retained the title as worst ozone-polluted metropolitan area.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, April 29, 2009

Bakersfield had the worst level of fine-particle pollution in the nation last year -- a toxic mix of soot, diesel exhaust, chemicals, metals and aerosols that contribute to heart attack, stroke and lung disease, according to the American Lung Assn.'s annual State of the Air report.

The San Joaquin Valley city displaced Los Angeles, which fell to the third spot in the category of year-round particle pollution, behind second-place Pittsburgh-New Castle, Pa.

Kern County, which includes Bakersfield, was ranked the worst county in the nation for average annual particulate pollution.

The lung association report is based on data from local governments' air monitoring stations and statistics gathered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Los Angeles-Long Beach retained its spot as the worst ozone-polluted metropolitan area, despite a slight improvement in its air in the last year. San Bernardino ranked as the nation's worst county for ozone pollution.

Ozone, a powerful gas formed when sunlight reacts with vapors from vehicles, factories and power plants, irritates the lungs when inhaled. It causes wheezing and asthma attacks and can shorten lives.

In Bakersfield and Kern County, heavy-duty trucks and farm equipment are the biggest sources of particulate pollution. But wood burning is also a large contributor to wintertime levels.

"The problem in the San Joaquin Valley is generated both from the emissions themselves and the meteorology of the Valley," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, a lung association official. "Inversion layers and stagnant weather holds pollutants close to communities, sometimes for days at a time."

Report: Most Americans in areas with unhealthy air

By Noaki Schwartz, The Associated Press

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Washington Post and other papers, Wednesday, April 29, 2009

LOS ANGELES — Sixty percent of Americans live in areas with unhealthy air pollution levels, despite a growing green movement and more stringent laws aimed at improving air quality, the American Lung Association said in a report released Wednesday.

The public-health group ranked the pollution levels of U.S. cities and counties based on air quality measurements that state and local agencies reported to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency between 2005 and 2007.

Overall, the report found that air pollution at times reaches unhealthy levels in almost every major city and that 186.1 million people live in those areas. The number is much higher than last year's figure of about 125 million people because recent changes to the federal ozone standard mean more counties recognize unhealthy levels of pollution.

Health effects from air pollution include changes in lung function, coughing, heart attacks, lung cancer and premature death.

"Six out of 10 Americans right now as we speak live in areas where the air can be dirty enough to send people to the emergency room, dirty enough to shape how kids' lungs develop and even dirty enough to kill," said Janice E. Nolen, the association's assistant vice president on national policy and advocacy.

Cities including Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, Charlotte, Philadelphia, Washington D.C. and Baltimore have seen improvements in air quality over the last decade, the report said.

The Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside region of Southern California remained the metropolitan area with the highest levels of ozone pollution, as it has in each of the past 10 reports. Other metropolitan areas considered to have the most ozone pollution included Houston-Baytown-Huntsville and Dallas-Fort Worth in Texas.

The areas with the most short-term particle pollution or soot were Pittsburgh-New Castle, Pa.; and the California areas of Fresno-Madera, Bakersfield and Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside.

The cleanest metro area in all categories was Fargo, N.D.

The rankings in the "State of the Air Report" were based on ozone pollution levels produced when heat and sunlight come into contact with pollutants from power plants, cars, refineries and other sources.

The lung association also studied short-term and year-round levels of particle pollution, which is made up of a mix of tiny solid and liquid particles in the air.

L.A. Mayor Villaraigosa touts city's cleaner air

By Rick Orlov, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Even with Los Angeles continuing to top the list of cities with the most pollution, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said Wednesday it is a sign that the city has improved and is on its way to being among the cleanest in America.

"I was born here and grew up here and I remember the days when we couldn't go outside," Villaraigosa said at a news conference on the step of City Hall.

"We have improved dramatically and we will continue to improve to become the cleanest, greenest cities in America."

Dr. William Stringer, an associate with the American Lung Association, that rated major metropolitan areas for pollution with its annual State of the Air report, said it does show improvement.

"The Los Angeles region has shown significant report over the last five years," Stringer said, citing a 40 percent reduction in small particulate matters and 25 percent in ozone.

"Los Angeles still ranks the worst in ozone pollution. Fortunately, we are making steady progress."

Villaraigosa said the city now has 10 percent of its energy produced through renewable sources, with a goal of 20 percent by the year 2010.

"Clean air is not only an environmental issues, but also a quality of life issue," Villaraigosa said.

Among the programs started by the city are the Clean Air Program at the port, designed to reduce diesel pollution from trucks, tough requirements on new buildings and promoting alternative energy programs.

Villaraigosa said the city plans to soon open a wind farm operation in the Tehachapis and developing a solar energy program for the Department of Water and Power.

Despite the defeat of the Measure B solar initiative in March, Villaraigosa said he hopes to soon begin talks with neighborhood leaders to launch a new solar program. The city has a goal of developing 1.3 gigawatts of solar by the year 2020.

L.A.'s air quality improves, but smog still bad

Daily News Wire Services

L.A. Daily News, Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Los Angeles continues to have some of the most polluted air in the country despite slight improvements, according to an annual American Lung Association report card released today.

Los Angeles ranked worst in the nation in ozone pollution, or smog, but fell in the national rankings in terms of particle pollution, or soot, according to the association's State of the Air report.

The city ranked third behind Bakersfield and Pittsburgh in the category of short-term particle pollution and fourth behind those two cities and Fresno for the most year-round particle pollution.

Last year, Los Angeles held the No. 1 slot in each category, except for short-term particle pollution, which fell to Pittsburgh.

More than half of California's counties received a failing grade on the Lung Association's annual report card, which uses letter grades to rate air quality.

"Although there are some improvements, the significant number of failing grades for ozone and particle pollution means that the health and lives of millions of Californians are at risk because of our dirty air," said Dr. Tony Gerber of the Lung Association.

Los Angeles air quality still among the worst

By Susan Abram, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Despite improvements over the years, the Los Angeles area remains the most ozone-polluted region in the country, according to a report released Tuesday by the American Lung Association.

The group's 10th annual national report also found that 38 California counties, including Los Angeles, received a failing grade for air quality - 12 more than last year.

Among other factors, the bad grades reflect a more stringent national ozone standard implemented in 2008, said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, senior policy director for the American Lung Association.

"California has had an enormous population growth and vehicle traffic," Holmes-Gen said. "Over the last 20 years, our population has doubled, our use of vehicles has grown and all forms of transportation, such as freight movement, diesel trucks, ships at the port and locomotion, also have increased."

The report was based on federal Environmental Protection Agency data from 2005-07. In comparing cities, it looked at metropolitan statistical areas that grouped together the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside region.

But Holmes-Gen said there's hope within the bad news. California has come a long way compared to 10 years ago when ozone weight in the air measured at 189.5 parts per million compared to the recent 138.8 parts per million.

The presence of fine airborne microscopic particles, known as particulate matter, also has decreased over the long and short term in Los Angeles County.

While there have been improvements, the grades and rankings show that more needs to be done.

"In the coming five years, I think you're going to see a lot of activity with cleaning up heavy-duty trucks, as well as the ports," said Sam Atwood, spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

Atwood said the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach want to replace the 16,000 older diesel trucks that handle the containers. The AQMD also is focusing on cleaning up ships, hoping the Obama administration will press a proposal made by the International Maritime Organization.

In addition, Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich continues to pursue his vision of "inland ports" in the Antelope Valley, Victorville and possibly at the March Airforce Base, where big rigs would pick up goods transported there by rail instead of driving to seaside ports.

Antonovich has said the plan would take a significant chunk of the 22,000 daily truck trips to and from the seaports of Long Beach and Los Angeles off three major corridors.

Goods would be hauled on existing train tracks from the seaports to an Antelope Valley "inland port" transfer station, where they would be loaded onto trucks bound for markets nationwide.

But challenges also remain.

"One of the main constraints on doing this is cost and amount of land necessary to create warehouse distribution," said Michael Cano, transportation deputy for Antonovich.

"That's why you need to go out to rural areas to do it."

The report also found the cleanest city in the United States for ozone air pollution was Billings, Mont., and the cleanest county for ozone air pollution was Yukon-Koyukuk Borough, Alaska.

Meanwhile, not all of California is polluted. Sixteen counties received an "A" grade for either low ozone or particle pollution days.

Contra Costa, Alameda counties get low marks for smog and particles in air

By Denis Cuff

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Residents of most California counties breathe unhealthy air, the American Lung Association said in its annual national report card that gave "F" grades to Contra Costa, Alameda, Santa Clara and Solano counties because of smog concentrations.

Contra Costa and Santa Clara counties also got "F" grades for fine-particle pollution from soot, dust and tiny droplets from motor vehicles, industries, fireplaces and other sources, the Lung Society, a clean air advocate, said in the report released today.

For particle pollution, Alameda County got a "C" and Solano County a "D."

Air pollution across the country has improved significantly since the 1970s, but six in 10 Americans — 186.1 million people — still live in counties with unhealthy air, Lung Association leaders said.

"Although there are some improvements, the significant number of failing grades for ozone and particle pollution means that the health and lives of millions of Californians are at risk because of our dirty air," said Anthony Gerber, a UC San Francisco pulmonary specialist and volunteer for the Lung Association.

Elsewhere in the Bay Area, San Francisco County got an "A" for smog but an "F" for fine particles.

Marin got an "A" for smog, and no grade for particles because of insufficient pollution data. San Mateo County got an "A" for smog, and a "B" for fine particles.

To produce the grades, the Lung Association relied on government pollution readings taken from 2005 to 2006, and then applied its own numerical ranking criteria based partly on how many days per year that pollution exceeds federal health limits.

The federal government in the past year has tightened limits for both smog and fine particles.

To keep warming low, deeper pollution cuts needed

By Seth Borenstein, AP Science Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, April 29, 2008

WASHINGTON—If the world is going to limit global warming to just a few degrees, it has to slash carbon dioxide pollution much more than now being discussed, two new science studies say.

Carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels—coal, oil and natural gas—is the chief cause of global warming.

The studies found there's a limit to how much manmade carbon dioxide can be added to the air before warming exceeds an increase of 2 degrees Celsius or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit—the level that many governments have set as a goal. World average temperatures going higher than that may be dangerous, some scientists say.

To keep under that danger level, the world has to spew less than 1.1 trillion tons of carbon dioxide in the first half of the 21st Century, according to studies published in Thursday's edition of the journal Nature.

In the first nine years of the century, the world has already emitted one-third of that amount and is on pace to hit that trillion ton limit in just 20 years, said climate researcher Malte Meinshausen of Germany's Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and lead author of one of the studies.

Even if the world ducks under that emissions limit, there is still a 25 percent chance of temperatures exceeding the dangerous mark, he said.

President Barack Obama said he wants to cut U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide by 80 percent. That is a "good start but it's not enough to limit warming," said Bill Hare, a study co-author who is also at the Potsdam Institute.

Assuming that other countries cut their per-person emission levels to match the United States, the United States has to cut its overall pollution by 90 to 95 percent to keep the world from exceeding the 1.1 trillion ton mark, Hare said.

Cutting emissions means not burning as much fossil fuels, leaving about three quarters of the known reserves in the ground, the study authors said.

"Not much at all of coal reserves can be burnt and still keep below" the 3.6 degrees of warming, Hare said.

World emissions must start dropping by 2015, otherwise cuts will have to be too draconian, Meinshausen said.

The studies, which used computer models, take a different approach than other research on figuring out how much carbon dioxide in the air is too much. Instead of the proportion of carbon

dioxide in the air at any given time, they looked at the total amount spewed out over many decades to arrive at a tipping point of 1.1 trillion tons.

Stephen Schneider of Stanford University who paints a worst case scenario for global warming in a commentary in the journal, said the studies make it seem like scientists know where there's a solid danger line for emissions, when they don't. The papers acknowledge there is a 25 percent chance the limit should be lower. Schneider said that's a pretty big risk when the consequences of being wrong are severe.

"If you had a 25 percent chance that walking into a room would give you serious flu, would you?" Schneider asked.

AP NewsBreak: US wants to move on climate change

By John Heilprin - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, April 29, 2009

UNITED NATIONS -- The Obama administration, in a major environmental policy shift, is preparing to ask 195 nations that ratified the U.N. ozone treaty to enact mandatory reductions in hydrofluorocarbons, according to U.S. officials and documents obtained by The Associated Press.

The change - the first U.S.-proposed mandatory global cut in greenhouse gases - would transform the ozone treaty into a strong tool for fighting global warming.

"Now it's going to be a climate treaty, with no ozone-depleting materials, if this goes forward," an Environmental Protection Agency technical expert on the ozone treaty said Wednesday, speaking on condition of anonymity because a decision was not final.

The expert said the 21-year-old ozone treaty known as Montreal Protocol created virtually the entire market for hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, so including them in the treaty would take care of a problem of its own making.

It's uncertain how that would work in conjunction with the Kyoto Protocol, the world's climate treaty, which now regulates HFCs and was rejected by the Bush administration. Negotiations to replace Kyoto, which expires in 2012, are to be concluded in December in Denmark.

The Montreal Protocol is widely viewed as one of the most successful environmental treaties because it essentially eliminated the use of chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, blamed for damaging the ozone layer over Antarctica.

Because they do not affect the ozone layer, HFCs broadly replaced CFCs as coolants in everything from refrigerators, air conditioners and fire extinguishers to aerosol sprays, medical devices and semiconductors.

But experts say the solution to one problem is now worsening another.

As a result, the U.S. is calling HFCs "a significant and growing source of emissions" that could be eliminated more quickly in several ways, including amending the ozone treaty or creating "a legally distinct agreement" linked to the Montreal Protocol, says a March 27 State Department briefing paper presented at one of two recent meetings on the topic.

State Department officials told participants at one of last month's meetings that the United States wants to amend the Montreal Protocol to phase out the use of HFCs, a change praised by environmentalists. But there appear to be some interagency snags.

Though the State Department secured backing from the Pentagon and other agencies for amending the Montreal Protocol, some opposition remains within the administration, U.S. officials say. It is not clear if the proposal to eliminate HFCs will be submitted by next week, in time to be considered at a meeting in November by parties to the Montreal Protocol.

Proponents say eliminating HFCs would have an impact within our lifetimes. HFCs do most of their damage in their first 30 years in the atmosphere, unlike carbon dioxide which spreads its impact over a longer period of time.

"Retiring HFCs is our best hope of avoiding a near-term tipping point for irreversible climate change. It's an opportunity the world simply cannot afford to miss, and every year we delay action on HFCs reduces the benefit," said Alexander von Bismarck, executive director of the Environmental Investigation Agency, a nonprofit watchdog group in Washington that first pitched the idea two years ago.

Globally, a huge market has sprung up around the use of HFCs, a man-made chemical, as a result of their promotion under the Montreal Protocol. Several billion dollars have been spent through an affiliated fund to prod countries to stop making and using CFCs and other ozone-damaging chemicals and to instead use cheap and effective chemicals like HFCs.

Scientists say eliminating use of HFCs would spare the world an amount of greenhouse gases up to about a third of all CO₂ emissions about two to four decades from now. Manufacturers in both Europe and the U.S. have begun to replace HFCs with so-called natural refrigerants such as hydrocarbons, ammonia or carbon dioxide.

HFCs can be up to 10,000 times more powerful than carbon dioxide as climate-warming chemicals, according to U.S. government data.

Currently they account for only about 2 percent of all greenhouse-gas emissions, but the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned in 2005 that use of HFCs was growing at 8.8 percent per year.

More recent studies concur and show that HFCs are on a path to reach about 11 billion tons of greenhouse gases, which would constitute up to a third of all greenhouse gas emissions by sometime within 2030 and 2040 under some CO₂-reduction scenarios.

House Democrats also are adding to the pressure on HFCs.

In an April 3 letter to President Barack Obama, California Rep. Henry Waxman, chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, and Massachusetts Rep. Edward Markey, chairman of the energy and environment subcommittee, urged the White House to offer an amendment to the Montreal Protocol this year.

"Although we strongly support a comprehensive international agreement on climate change, we believe that adding HFCs to the existing Montreal Protocol would be a sensible, cost-effective method of addressing a small but growing piece of the problem," they wrote.

Waxman and Markey also have drafted legislation laying out a broad outline for phasing out HFCs in the United States.

Worldwide, phasing out HFCs under the Montreal Protocol could prevent 90 billion tons of greenhouse gases by 2040, by including nations like India and China that were not part of the Kyoto treaty.

Nations such as Argentina, the Federated States of Micronesia, Mauritius and Mexico have recently pushed for climate protections under the Montreal Protocol, arguing every possible tool must be used to combat climate change.

The EPA in April determined that hydrofluorocarbons were one of six greenhouse gases endangering human health and welfare, a ruling that could eventually lead to mandatory reductions in the U.S. under the Clean Air Act.

"This is a strong sign of new American leadership in atmospheric protection," said von Bismarck.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wednesday, April 29, 2009:](#)

Doesn't want Wal-Mart

What happened to local home rule that protected Clovis? How could any informed Clovis planning commissioner or Clovis City Council member support a Wal-Mart Super Center near Highway 168 and Clovis Avenue? It will create traffic gridlock, change traffic patterns, increase air pollution and require significant police surveillance.

The effect on established shopping centers will be devastating. What a bogus environmental impact report that declared the water and urban decay would be "minimal." It will require strong leadership to welcome Wal-Mart at this location without the "super store" designation.

In the short term, the project would bring construction jobs and development fees to the city. However, document the long-term economical benefits a Wal-Mart super store has provided other cities and measure that gain against the business closures and job losses it created.

Wal-Mart has a successful location on Shaw Avenue. They are an integral part of "The Avenue." I wish them continued success there.

Peg Bos, Clovis

[Letter to the Washington Post, Wednesday, April 29, 2009](#)

Renewable Energy Myths and Facts

The April 24 op-ed by James Schlesinger and Robert L. Hirsch, "Getting Real on Wind and Solar," recycled tired myths about renewable energy that have been conclusively refuted by a number of sources, including the Bush administration's Energy Department. A quick read of the department's 2008 report "20% Wind Energy by 2030" would reveal that:

-- Wind energy does not require 100 percent backup, and the minimal amount of power system reserves that are needed, added to the existing fleet of reserves, have almost no effect on carbon dioxide emissions. All generators (coal, nuclear and gas) require some power system backup. In a recently released report, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation confirmed the feasibility of high wind penetration without the need for anywhere near 100 percent backup.

-- The Energy Department's report calculated that 20 percent wind power compared with a scenario of no new wind energy production would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by the equivalent of taking 140 million cars off the road, at an additional cost to the average ratepayer equal to a can of Coke a month.

*Denise Bode, Chief Executive
American Wind Energy Assn.*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses initiative that will regulate emissions from nitrogen trifluoride, a pollutant 17 thousand times more dangerous than CO2. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Avanzan en contra de contaminante 17 mil veces más dañino que el dióxido de carbono

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, April 29, 2009

El comité de Calidad Ambiental del Senado de California aprobó una iniciativa para regular las emisiones de trifluoruro de nitrógeno, un contaminante 17 mil veces más peligroso que el dióxido de carbono. La senadora latina, Jenny Oropeza, autora de la propuesta, dijo que de aprobarse, la iniciativa instruirá a la Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California a regular emisiones del contaminante clasificado como NF3 y otros gases, todos más peligrosos que el comúnmente denominado "smog".

De acuerdo con estudios de la Universidad de California en San Diego, el NF3 contribuye miles de veces más al cambio climático que el dióxido de carbono, y es uno de los gases que más rápidamente crecen en la atmósfera.

Apoyan la propuesta la Unión de Científicos contra el cambio climático, Sierra Club y la Coalición por el Aire Limpio.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses City of Long Beach has hybrid public transportation buses. They purchased 25 buses that run on gas and electricity.

Los autobuses híbridos de Long Beach

José Fuentes-Salinas

Impacto USA, Monday, April 27, 2009

Lo que se dice suele ser tan prefabricado, que la historia suele quedar embarrada en un folder.

Pero me insistieron que fuera a la presentación de los nuevos autobuses híbridos de Long Beach, y como sería ahí, precisamente donde todos los días tomo el autobús, creí que era una oportunidad para preguntarles a las autoridades sobre mis observaciones de varios años.

Creámelo, soy casi un experto del transporte público.

He usado diariamente por varios años el Metro de la Ciudad de México y Los Angeles, así como los autobuses de Long Beach.

Y sí. Me dió gusto ver que la Ciudad de Long Beach compró 25 autobuses de 40 pies que cuestan medio millón de dólares, y trabajan con gasolina y electricidad.

Muy contentos, el alcalde de Long Beach, Bob Foster, y el presidente del Transporte de la ciudad, Larry Jackson, se subieron a una unidad y nos dieron una vuelta a la prensa.

Le pregunté al alcalde, cómo le hacía para balancear la cantidad con la calidad de los autobuses, porque si bien es cierto que da gusto que se piense en tener esas unidades ecológicas, da más gusto saber que no vamos a tener que esperar una hora para agarrar nuestro camioncito, y que llegará justo cuando está prometido.

Imagino que no es lo mismo tener unas cuantas unidades de lujo, que tener varias modestas unidades que circulen con más frecuencia. Muchos posibles nuevos pasajeros del sistema de transporte público se descepcionan en los primeros días luego de ver lo ineficiente que es el transporte.

Y, claro, buena oferta genera demanda, y, al revés, más demanda obliga a más oferta.

El alcalde me dijo que efectivamente, calidad y cantidad son dos conceptos que suelen estar en contra... Pero que pensáramos que esa inversión mayor en autobuses híbridos sería recuperada en términos de una mejor salud para los habitantes de la ciudad (por si no sabían, esos autobuses, además de que son muy cómodos, contaminan menos).

Bien dicho.

Luego me fui con Larry Jackson, el mero jefe de todos los choferes que saludo todos los días y que tan amablemente me esperan a que trepe mi bicicleta en la trompa del autobús.

A Jackson le pregunté que cómo le hacía para revisar cotidianamente la calidad de los servicios, y si enviaba inspectores para recoger información.

Y aquí, pensaba en una serie de puntos, fruto de mi experiencia de usuario:

-Autobuses que no pasan a la hora.

-Poca frecuencia de viajes.

-Choferes poco amables (pocos, pero los hay).

-Falta de información cuando hay alguna anomalía...

Jackson me dijo que de vez en cuando llegaban algunos de sus empleados de incógnito... Pero, justo cuando le iba a preguntar que si el mismo, con sus más allegados, solía usar el transporte público, llegó Marcelle Epley, la gerente de marketing, a decirle que ya lo estaban esperando.

Me quedé con ella.

Me dió un número de teléfono adonde la gente puede hablar y quejarse o hacer comentarios para mejorar el servicio: (562) 591-2301.

Marcelle, quien alguna vez trabajó con nuestros colegas del Press-Telegram, también me dijo que el motivo principal de las llamadas que se hacen son relacionadas a un autobús que no pasa.

Con esto, confirmo que uno de los motivos que impiden que más gente use el transporte público es ¡los horarios!... Y la confiabilidad.

El transporte público, con todos sus defectos, es la mejor alternativa para salvar el planeta, pero hay mucho que hacer.

Ya para irme, pasé a la Estación "F", donde todos los días tomo mi camión de regreso a casa.

Ahí estaba una chamaca leyendo un libro de la Biblioteca Pública.

Me dió gusto ver a Isabe Osuna, de 16 años, haciendo lo que todos deberíamos hacer: leer y usar el transporte público.

Le pregunté a ella si la frecuencia de viajes y las eventuales tardanzas eran un problema.

Me dijo que no.

"Every once in a while there are some delays... But I don't care. It's reliable".

Oooops!